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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today expressed its alarm at the recent spate of bombings of churches in Baghdad and Mosul and called on the Iraqi government to provide protection to all of the country's citizens, especially its vulnerable Christian minority. The bombings occurred late Saturday evening, Sunday afternoon, Sunday evening, and Monday at six churches throughout Baghdad and one in Mosul. USCIRF sources in Baghdad report that 14 civilians were killed and several more were injured in the weekend bombings. Initial press reports indicate several injuries in today's attack in Mosul.

"The Iraqi government, which is now fully responsible for security in its cities, must apprehend and punish the perpetrators of this violence and must ensure that civilian property and lives, particularly of its most vulnerable citizens, are protected," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. "The U.S. government should insist that the Iraqi government protect all of its citizens. Christians are one of Iraq's ancient, indigenous peoples, and their continued presence there is essential to Iraq's future as a democratic, pluralistic, and rule of law society."

Iraq's small Christian community has been particularly vulnerable to violence in Iraq because it does not have militia or tribal structures to protect itself and does not receive adequate official protection. Extremists have in the past used coordinated bombings of Christian churches to threaten and intimidate this community. For example, in January 2008, six churches in Mosul and Baghdad were bombed in coordinated attacks on Epiphany and Orthodox Christmas Eve. Christian leaders, including the Archbishop of Mosul, have also been targeted by kidnappings and killings. Since 2003, many Christians have fled Iraq for other countries. Christian leaders have warned that the result of this flight may be the end of Christianity in Iraq.

The current attacks come at a time when U.S. troops in Iraq are drawing down, and they appear to be part of a renewed effort by insurgents to destabilize the Iraqi government.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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